

The International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act passes as part of Foreign Relations Authorization Act

Washington, DC – Legislation authored by Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04), the *International Protecting Girls by Preventing Child Marriage Act of 2009* (H.R. 2103), was approved today by the U.S. House of Representatives. The child marriage bill was included in the final passage of the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* (H.R. 2410).

“Passing this legislation is an important step towards ending child marriage and protecting the rights of young girls to be treated as children, not wives. By prioritizing and valuing girls in the developing world, the U.S. sends a signal to countries like Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Yemen that the practice of allowing 10, 11, or 12 year olds to be married to much older men is a human rights violation,” Congresswoman McCollum said.

Earlier this year Congresswoman McCollum introduced H.R. 2103, a bi-partisan bill with the support of more than 65 House Members, to prevent the act of child marriage. Congresswoman McCollum's language was added to the *Foreign Relations Authorization Act*, asserting that child marriage is a human rights violation that undermines America's investments in foreign assistance to improve women's and girls' education, health, and economic status.

“The well being of women and girls in the world's poorest countries needs to be made a priority if U.S. foreign assistance efforts are going to be successful. Millions of girls are robbed of the

opportunity to learn, be free, choose their own husband, and contribute fully to the future of their family and community because of this harmful, traditional practice," Congresswoman McCollum said.

Child marriage is a form of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse that condemns girls to a life of forced labor and poverty. Globally, an estimated 60 million girls in the developing world under the age of 18 are married. Little girls are being forced into marriages with men decades older in developing countries. These child brides are five times more likely to die in childbirth, four times more likely to drop out of school, three times more likely to encounter violence at home, and twice as likely to have an infant die during childbirth.

"The lives, rights, and well-being of women and girls must be respected, promoted, and defended," Congresswoman McCollum added.

The *Foreign Relations Authorization Act* makes a critical contribution to U.S. national security by recognizing that child marriage is contrary to the goals of the country's international support programs. The State Department has been under-resourced in the face of critical foreign policy challenges for several years. The bill is a proactive response to address that diplomacy gap by authorizing the recruitment of 1,500 new Foreign Service Officers and increasing the agency's budget to rebuild U.S. diplomatic capacity.

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-4) serves on the House Appropriations & Budget Committees.

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